



## *When Asia Was the World*

Were you surprised to find that this book—recommended for a reading list about the history of Islam—actually begins with the story of a Chinese Buddhist’s voyage to India? How does it change your perception of Islam to see it framed in terms of its relations with Asia, instead of with the Western world?

Each of the chapters in *When Asia Was the World* is based on a first-person historical narrative, with one exception: the Intan Shipwreck off the coast of Sumatra, which serves as the protagonist of Chapter Four. To what extent can material objects “tell stories”? In what way is their use analogous to written texts, and in what ways are they different? Do you think it is possible to “write history” without written evidence from the past?

In what way do the individual life experiences in *When Asia Was the World* fit together to form a coherent whole? Besides the experience of travel itself, what are the recurring themes and points of intersection between the different chapters? Conversely, are there any that seem not to fit?

Gordon’s book covers a large sweep of time, but can it really be considered “history”? Is there evidence that the world changed in some profound way between the sixth and the sixteenth century? If so, how?